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ABSTRACT

The role of formal education as a disseminator of new information and producer of significant learning experiences has been continuously diminishing. Interest is growing in learning that occurs in the informal action environments of everyday life and workplaces. Informal learning occurs in varied places and by varied means. Work teaches self-discipline, time management, education's value, social interaction, empathy, and planning. Hobbies provide opportunities for identity work; teach self expression, discipline, social interaction, independence, and leadership skills; and allow young people to test their limits. New information technology helps develop visual perception; teaches such skills as the ability to operate computers and read visual knowledge; and are sources of information. Consumption develops individuals' ability to express themselves and make choices; is an instrument of identity; and teaches how to use money and compare prices. Peer groups, leisure activities, role games, and family situations create situations for learning and personal development. They teach how to exchange perspectives, work in teams, communicate with others, assume responsibility, and tolerate difference. Families transmit values and traditions. Formal education must accept the challenge posed by learning experiences in everyday life settings and adopt forms of learning that stem from people's own experiences and are closely associated with their everyday life-world. (Contains 20 references.) (YLB)

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POSSIBILITIES OF INFORMAL LEARNING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL

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Formal Education in Late Modern Society

Late modern society has opened up new opportunities, but has also created risks and uncertainty in the everyday life-world of citizens. These opportunities and risks are transmitted in many ways to educational system, to peoples workplaces and their everyday life. The rapid proliferation of new information technology in turn have created an open learning environment within the everyday life-world, with the result that schools no longer have a monopoly over knowledge and learning. Furthermore, economic uncertainty, and mass unemployment have also weakened the status of formal education, and education is no longer regarded as a secure investment for the future. As Erik Allardt (1988, 19□24) points out, the formal school system was developed to meet the needs of the expanding industrial society. The rise of the industrial society needed a unified symbolic system and a shared conceptual framework. Also, the rationalities of the industrial society presupposed that the reproduction of labour is based on universal learning sequences grounded on a common language, a common temporal structure, and shared cultural meanings. Schools became production units rather similar to factories, with Tayloristic teaching practices defining the boundaries of teaching and learning in a didactics based on discrete subject-areas in curricula.

In late modern society such a belief in cultural uniformity, industrial mode of living and continuous economic growth is crumbling. All-encompassing explanations such as religion, science or nationalist ideology are loosing their self-evident nature, and people have to get accustomed to continuous change, incomplete projects, interruptions, and the penetration of media into every sphere of social life. As Anthony Giddens (1993, 56-107) has noted, living in a globalized world both demands and develops reflexivity. Many traditions earlier regarded as binding have become contractual, customs have become informal, and authorities have lost some of their power. The late modern world seems to have become increasingly shapeable and difficult to predict. It has forced individuals and communities to become flexible and develop looser norms of action. This makes it easier to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and new life-situations.

The everyday life-world of individuals has differentiated into a variety of spheres and post-traditional forms of community. It may therefore be reasonable to analyze the identity of individuals as multifarious, decentralized and undefined on the one hand, and as characterized by most varied, overlapping discourses □ including those of gender, race, religion, social class, and language □ on the other. Klaus Hurrelmann (1989, 3□26) argues that recent changes in the social world of individuals call for a re-evaluation of the importance of the family, peer groups, free time, work and school. The school system by contrast grounds itself on the idea of stable labour markets and an underlying conception of an integrated subject who has a harmonious life course.

The school system has not been able to introduce enough flexibility into its pedagogic methods and curricula. Schools still try to handle and equip today□s young people with such knowledge and skills that have their origin in the industrial society and tayloristic work organization. Adaptation to standardized thought models, curricula and classroom routines have played an important role in training previous generations to meet the demands of the industrial work society. However, the demands of late modern society have become so complex and flexible that such standardized thought models can hinder the learning of new reflexive strategies of action and thought. Günter Dohmen (1993, 71□76) emphasize that it is necessary to contextualize learning into everyday life and work settings, interaction situations, and acquisition of new skills and knowledge. It seems to be true that late modern working life will require its workers to be flexible, communicative and able to work in rapidly changing teamwork situations. Standardized thought models, routinized work procedures and

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stable knowledge structures are no longer as relevant as they were in the industrial society. Therefore, it is necessary to regard learning as an elementary part of everyday life, social interaction and action competencies.

Learning Inside and Outside the School

The way students nowadays observe and evaluate schooling is completely different from the way the institution was perceived in the past. However, it seems to be typical of all kinds of learning that it is embedded in various contexts and life settings. In fact, learning is, above all, a kind of response to the problems that have arisen from the demands of everyday action situations. Jean Lave and Ethienne Wenger (1991, 29–37) have emphasized that learning is connected with all kinds of knowledge, skills, understanding, communication and participation that arise from everyday life. Learning is an elementary part of the everyday life, and its practical activities, and all spheres of everyday life-world, and action situations should be regarded and studied as meaningful learning environments. In late-modern society learning has been placed within the context of the everyday life, social networks and changing action situations of citizens.

As assumed before, the role of formal education as a disseminator of new information and producer of significant learning experiences has been continuously diminishing. Nowadays there is more and more interest in learning that takes place in the informal action environments of everyday life and workplaces. The weakening importance of education is connected with an extensive sociocultural change. Ari Antikainen (1996, 251-261) has emphasized that significant learning experiences increasingly unfolds outside formal educational institutions in various non-formal and informal situations. Workplaces and the new information technology provide opportunities for learning, as do free time and a variety of everyday action settings, such as hobbies, electronic media, voluntary organizations and the family.

The educational system has been rather insensitive to the fact that people live today in a highly differentiated social world. The media, leisure-time activities, work and consumption increasingly structure the lives of the individuals. At the same time they presuppose skills and competencies that the organizational setting of schools, classroom-based teaching, and the subject-based curricula cannot offer. A great deal of those learning experiences that has relevance for individuals have shifted outside schools. On the basis of qualitative studies, in one senior high school with 151 students and interviews with 28 university students in Jyväskylä and with 26 adults at their 40s all over the country, it can be argued that meaningfully important learning experiences seldom take place in school (Aittola, Jokinen & Laine 1995, 43-55; Aittola, Koikkalainen & Vaherva 1997, 38–40; Aittola 1998, 103-117).

Due to the rapid development of new information technology and its effects on the everyday life formal education has lost its monopoly over learning and the acquisition of new knowledge. Friends, family life, consumption, work, free-time activities and the uses of new medias thus serve as everyday life learning environments that permit the young to acquire various kinds of knowledge, skills and competencies. Thomas Ziehe (1991, 205–207) uses the expression "unconventional learning", by which he refers to learning in unconventional circumstances – in such new contexts that are meaningful for the young in their life-situations. There are, however, certain ambivalences between these life-spheres, because some of them, like school and work, represent public institutional spheres which demand more standardized norms of action as well as decentralization and adoption of the reality principle. By contrast, consumption and the use of the new information technology are individually constructed and chosen, therefore representing intimate spheres which are supported by pleasure (Aittola 1998, 106-108).

Formal education

Spheres like school and work are the most institutionalized spheres of the life-world of today's citizens. Perhaps this is why schools were regarded by the students as such dull and boring places, whose most important function was the creation of "normality" and teaching subject-based, detailed "school knowledge". According

to our study, student's experiences of education varied considerably (Aittola 1998, 108-109). Language and mathematical skills, reading, writing, and social skills were seen as the most important school-related skills. A well-rounded education, an understanding of the limits of one's knowledge, and an increase in cultural awareness were mentioned. It was often said that students would not have enough patience to learn grammar, rules of mathematics, physics or chemistry by themselves, without school. Furthermore, many interviewed respondents told that school has given them opportunities for social interaction, adjustment to rules, co-operation and teamwork, and togetherness.

Self-discipline, obedience, responsibility and social participation were emphasized as such school-related things that were connected with world views and values. In general, school is regarded as a 'public sphere', where people can work and meet their peers. But the meaning of schooling has become instrumental: one has to go to school, although it feels meaningless and boring. As Ulrich Beck (1986, 232) assumes, students know that although school cannot guarantee any secure career trajectory, they need the school certificate as a further step in education and labour markets. In formal education it is difficult to take into account adults' work and life experiences as well as learning goals, but unless education has enough connections with people's life-world and experiences or with the rest of society, its symbolic status begins to crumble and a large number of significant learning processes have no longer place within formal education system (Aittola, Koikkalainen & Vaherva 1997, 33).

Workplace

Informal learning at workplace can with good reason also be regarded as self-directed learning that the rest of the work community and unofficial contexts can support or hamper. Rob Gerber, Colin Lankshear, Stefan Larsson and Lennart Svensson (1995, 26–32) associate this kind of learning with: observing one's own ways of working, learning from one's mistakes, learning from social interaction and informal discussions with colleagues, developing one's skills in formal work training, learning to use intuition in planning, learning experientially to manage and coordinate projects, and learning based on the adoption of a variety of quality assessment methods. Workers learn best when they can make independent decisions and choices. It is important to develop informal learning in the workplace when attempts are made to develop the entire work organization as well as the competence of individual workers.

The importance of working has increased during the last ten years as a source of learning new things especially among young citizens. Besides financial resources, work provides a feeling of adultness, community, belonging, respect, and citizenship. Work teaches self-discipline to young people and forces them to rationalize their timetables. Lasse Siurala (1994, 242) has noted that working teaches people to 'shuttle' between home, school, hobbies, and workplace. We have noticed that working is good way to get acquainted with labour markets and with various kinds of jobs/workplaces. Adjustment to working life, learning its multifarious skills and action competencies and new experiences was cited as the most important outcomes of working also among adults. Work teaches people to value education, social interaction, empathy, planning, and manners. Work has taught responsibility, co-operation with all kinds of people, and adaptation to their needs. (Aittola, Koikkalainen & Vaherva 1997, 33-34.)

Hobbies

Hobbies – like music, sports, acting, arts, dance and culture – constitute nowadays one of the most important spheres of living and learning, and they give good opportunities for individual identity work. In addition, they give opportunities for various skills related to self-expression, but they also teach discipline and sociality, and allow young people to test their limits. As Tommi Hoikkala (1993, 92–96) has argued, free-time activities have partly taken over the educational role of schools and parents – a process in which the self-education of young people plays an increasingly important role. Parents have been able to shift some of their educational

responsibility and disciplinary role to coaches, tutors and young people themselves, with the result that they have gained more space for companionable relationships with their children.

Hobbies provide an opportunity for several kinds of learning processes, but for some reason there has been very little research on informal learning based on hobbies. We found out that our respondents had learned a lot of hobby-related techniques – playing an instrument, mastering a sport, and other concrete skills – during their free time. Social interaction skills, increasing independence and taking control of one's life, acting in groups and practising leadership skills had been other such learning processes. Things that were regarded as important included good presentation skills, relaxation in free time, efficient time management etc. In their free-time activities people have learned to organize various occasions and meetings, and their awareness of their own limits had increased. (Aittola, Koikkalainen & Vaherva 1997, 34–35, 49–51).

Media

The new information technology, satellite television, computers and the Internet have considerably widened young people's symbolic reality. In addition to their function as disseminators of new trends from Music Television and providers of entertainment, computers, television and satellite channels help to develop visual perception and a variety of skills that will be needed in the future, such as the ability to operate computers and read visual knowledge, as Süess, Suoninen, Garitaonandia, Juaristi, Koikkalainen & Olega (1998, 521-538) have observed. In our research the young ones told us that they adopt new ways and styles of spending their free time from television. Advertisements and rock videos influence consumption, clothing and styles, whereas films give role models and teach how to act in different kinds of problem situations. In principle, the same is true of adults' use of computers, although adults use them mainly for work. Adults typically use computers for word processing, spreadsheet calculation and modelling, but also for entertainment (Aittola, Koikkalainen & Vaherva 1997, 34-35).

News and current affairs programmes are sources of new information. Several respondents told us that they have learned to use newspapers and television as their main sources of information, as ways of improving their knowledge of foreign languages and learning to distinguish between light entertainment and current affairs programmes. The most important function of television has been its informative role and the possibility of instantly transmitting news, reports and visual information from different parts of the world. It has enormously widened the boundaries of social reality and contributed to the creation of reflexive 'global consciousness' (Aittola 1998, 111).

Consumption

Consumption can be regarded as a sphere that develops both individuals' ability to express themselves and to make choices. There has been a structural change from the consumption of concrete material objects and utilities such as refrigerators, cars and radios to a wide variety of symbolic phenomena, and commodities have been supplemented with services and entertainment like rock concerts, movies, gyms, happenings, and spectacles of all kinds. Robert Bocokin (1993, 51) sees consumption today above all as a 'mental state' which is only loosely connected with the satisfaction of simple biological needs. The modern consumer walks in shopping malls seeking 'that something' that he desires and that advertisements and display windows promise him: enjoyment, youth, prestige. Consumption satisfies desires rather than needs: those who eat at McDonald's do not do that only to satisfy their hunger.

Consumption can be regarded as instrument of identity-working, as hardly any other sphere is so oriented by the 'pleasure principle'. A growing part of young people's consumption is directed towards 'CCCs' – clothes, cafés, and CDs – which allow them to aesthetize their bodies and construct their own individual styles. However, shopping also gives good opportunities for adult people to make choices and develop their aesthetic style. We have observed, that the meaning of consumption and shopping has increased

in the everyday lives of young citizens, but the greatest part of young adults thought that consumption has not taught them anything that they could have not learn elsewhere, too. Consumption does, however, teach one to use money, and the appreciation of money, comparing prices, saving and planning were also things that people thought they had learned from consumption. There were not many differences between young men and women in this respect. Deliberation and the evasion of impulse buying were also considered important (Aittola 1998, 112-113).

Peers and family life

Peer groups, leisure activities, role games and family situations also create important situations for learning and personal development. In spite of all these changes in family structures, the importance of the family has not disappeared. Peers and the family, as Ivar Förnes (1996, 46–52) has found, teach people to exchange perspectives, work in teams and communicate with others. These skills are important, because work processes in the future will typically take the form of team work, in which communication skills, fluency of cooperation, and the ability to rapidly organize joint action are central. The significance of these competencies will increase even more if wage work becomes both temporally and spatially flexible. Moreover, the family will give the feeling of togetherness, love and devotion, and it will also teach how to live together with others, how to solve problems, how to share homework and construct the everyday life-world (Aittola, Koikkalainen & Vaherva 1997, 35–36).

According to our respondents, the transmission of values and traditions has been the most important task of the family. The family was the place where the they learned to assume responsibility, take care of others, be sociable and flexible, appreciate work and close relations, and tolerate difference. Close relationships and the family in particular can provide many significant experiences that are conducive to personal growth and learning. Sarah B. Merriam and Baiyin Yang (1996, 77–79) have also noticed that many dramatic changes in people's perspectives are connected with major life-changes like getting married, becoming a parent, falling ill, and so on. Marriage and parenting, for example, were significantly related to people's experiences of mastery and control; marriage increased their experience of agency, or internal control, while becoming a parent produced many external demands and required finding a balance between work, family, and so on, with the result that people felt that they had less control over their lives.

Ambivalences of Formal Education

In late modern society learning is contextualised in the everyday lives of individuals, in social networks, and in the main spheres of their life-worlds. However, this kind of informal learning is not always regarded as "learning" in the conventional meaning of the concept. In fact, many work settings and action situations have become so complex that standardized thought models that are still kept on in formal education can even hinder the recognition of informal learning processes (Kauppi 1994, 99–104). Therefore, there is an urgent need for the re-definition of the concept of learning and for contextualizing learning in everyday life in connection with life-skills, action competencies, and re-orientations of changing action situations and interactions. It is no longer relevant to regard learning as something that is located only in certain kinds of formal educational settings at school. Learning is an element in the everyday life of individuals; it is a way of empowering their skills, action competencies and social interaction.

The formal education system has failed to accept the challenge posed by the learning experiences in everyday life settings. Much of the important knowledge and competence required in today's working life and social life are acquired outside school. Spheres like workplaces, hobbies, the media, computer games, consumption, family and peer groups serve as learning settings whose importance should not be underestimated. Schools could, however, turn the informal everyday learning into an interface with their pedagogical activities. In a more open and better communicating form, schools could create structure and order

for the fragmentary experiences and knowledge of the students. The learning based on different spheres of everyday life is usually unplanned, unsystematic, and fragmentary. In addition, it quite often manifest "learning the hard way" from one's mistakes. The school, by contrast, is able to produce pre-planned and cumulative learning experiences in which information is connected with larger cognitive structures. A more communicative and open education system could put the information and experiences gained in everyday life into a wider perspective. (Aittola, Jokinen & Laine 1995, 49–53.)

Here lies one permanent ambivalence of formal education in late modern society: on the one hand we have the well-organized school system, an administrative apparatus with its endless rules and regulations; on the other, we are faced with the changed cultural situation in which students' own subjective needs and desires have assumed unprecedented importance. With insufficient contacts with the labour market or the life-world of students, formal education system is loosing its symbolic status, while a great deal of those learning processes shift outside schools. Lasse Siurala (1994, 227–231) writes about the breakdown of the self-evident legitimacy of education in the everyday and free-time praxis of individuals a situation where activities oriented to leisure time have become the most important sources of meaning. The emphasis on the importance of leisure time reflects a shift from the recognition of the intrinsic value of work and education to an instrumental understanding of them. Thus, it might be better to see the school system as the kind of social space and public realm whose preconditions one must recognize and acknowledge, but also as a space that opens up new opportunities for learning.

In formal education it is, therefore, necessary to adopt such forms of learning that stem from people's own experiences and are associated closely to their everyday life-world. It is important to promote such educational reforms that will pay more attention to students' needs and learning interests and give them an opportunity to have their voices heard. The goal of education would be to intertwine formal education and informal learning in a way that would support people's own initiative and promote their self-actualization and the realization of their skills. Peter Alheit (1995, 5) argues that education utilizing biographical guidance and training could reduce the social contradictions caused by mass unemployment and contribute to the formation of communal structures and interpersonal bonds rooted in individuals themselves. Above all, the kind of formal adult education that would be sensitive to biographical factors could develop the kind of "natural" forms of everyday learning that would not marginalize anyone.

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